



Case Study Report:

**CommonLit 360 at Lakewood
Middle School in New Jersey**

2024



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background: Lakewood Middle School	2
Key Research Questions	2
Methods	3
In-Depth Interviews with Lakewood Staff	3
Quantitative Analysis of NJSLA Scores	3
Quantitative Analysis of CommonLit Usage and Academic Outcomes	3
Results	4
Growth on the NJSLA	4
Correlations between the NJSLA and the CommonLit Assessment Series	7
Growth on the CommonLit Assessment Series	7
CommonLit 360 Usage and Assessment Scores	8
Themes from Interviews with Lakewood Staff	9
<i>How CommonLit Shaped Teaching Practices and the Classroom Environment</i>	9
<i>How CommonLit Made Teachers' Jobs Easier</i>	12
<i>How CommonLit Provided Structure and Variety for Students to Grow</i>	14
<i>Lakewood's Process of Adopting the CommonLit 360 Curriculum</i>	17
Conclusion	20
References	22
Appendix	24

Executive Summary

Lakewood Middle School (Lakewood) adopted CommonLit 360 as their English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum in the 2022-2023 school year. We report on Lakewood's early success in this case study report. Lakewood's success became apparent through their students' scores on the CommonLit Assessment Series. Lakewood saw a 111% increase in the number of students who scored proficient (on grade or above grade level) in reading comprehension from the beginning to the end of the year. This case study report merges findings from educator interviews with student performance on their state standardized end-of-year ELA tests (New Jersey Student Learning Assessment; NJSLA) and growth on their CommonLit Assessment series tests.

Key Findings:

- Lakewood Middle School more than doubled the number of students who scored proficient (on grade or above grade level) on the CommonLit Assessment Series from the beginning to the end of the school year.
- The amount of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the NJSLA was 10.5 percentage points higher in 2022-2023 than in 2021-2022.
- The more CommonLit 360 lessons students experienced, the better they tended to perform on end-of-year ELA assessments (NJSLA and CommonLit assessments).

How did Lakewood students achieve these gains? Here are some key takeaways from interviews with teachers and an administrator.

CommonLit provided:

- A ready-to-teach, standards-aligned, full-year ELA curriculum, allowing teachers to spend more time teaching and less time planning and creating materials
- Reliable and valid ELA assessments to evaluate students' baseline understanding and facilitate effective preparation for end-of-year standardized tests
- An easy-to-use dashboard with instant data to monitor student progress in real time, resulting in adaptable instruction to meet student needs
- Planning resources, such as a pacing guide that facilitated efficient creation of a school-specific pacing guide

What did Lakewood teachers say about the impact of CommonLit 360 on their students?

- *Rigor and challenge:* Students felt the rigor of CommonLit 360 and rose to the challenge.
- *Increased confidence:* With CommonLit, students became more confident in their reading abilities, with some even volunteering to read in front of the whole class.

- *Structure and engagement:* With CommonLit’s structure, students knew what to expect, yet each class was engaging due to the varied texts and different modalities of learning.
- *Windows and mirrors:* CommonLit provided both windows into other viewpoints and experiences, as well as mirrors that reflected students’ own identities and experiences

What factors contributed to a smoother rollout of CommonLit 360 at Lakewood?

- Paid professional development (PD) sessions before the school year
- Support and PD sessions from a dedicated CommonLit account manager
- Guidance from fellow teachers and a literacy coach who instilled autonomy in teachers
- Regular check-ins during professional learning communities (PLCs)

Background: Lakewood Middle School

After noticing remarkable student growth on the CommonLit Assessment Series from the beginning to end of the 2022-2023 school year, we reached out to Lakewood Middle School to learn more about their experience with CommonLit 360. Lakewood Middle School is a public school located in Lakewood Township School District, New Jersey. School year 2022-2023 was the first year in which the school taught using CommonLit 360 as their primary curriculum. Prior to adopting CommonLit 360, several teachers were already using CommonLit to supplement their curriculum. When it was time to adopt a new curriculum, teachers recommended CommonLit 360 because of its rigor, alignment with standards, and themes. Although CommonLit 360 can be taught non-digitally, as a digital 1:1 school (1 computer per student), teachers at Lakewood were easily able to assign digital lessons.

Demographically, a majority of the Lakewood Middle School students identify as Hispanic. Forty-seven percent of the students identify as female. Twenty-five percent are English Language Learners. The majority are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Details may be found in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Key Research Questions

1. What was Lakewood’s experience with CommonLit 360 during the first year of implementation (2022-2023)?
2. What were the trends in students’ scores on the state ELA assessment during the 2021-2022 school year compared to the 2022-2023 school year?
3. Was there a relationship between CommonLit usage and students’ academic outcomes?

Methods

We answered these research questions using a mixed-methods approach. Specifically, we conducted in-depth interviews with Lakewood staff and conducted quantitative analyses with state test scores and CommonLit backend data. Following collection of quantitative and qualitative data, we analyzed the data and compared findings to identify results supported by both methods.

In-Depth Interviews with Lakewood Staff

To learn more about Lakewood's experience with CommonLit 360, we conducted in-depth interviews with four Lakewood staff members:

- **Kevin Walters** is the Supervisor of ELA for Grades 3-12 and Music & Fine Arts for Grades K-12. Kevin has 17 years of experience at Lakewood.
- **Sarah Johnson** is the Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12. During the 22-23 school year, she was a 7th grade ELA teacher. Sarah has 23 years of experience at Lakewood.
- **Alicia Intromasso** is the Special Education Coordinator and a 7th grade ELA teacher for students with disabilities. During the 22-23 school year, she taught ELA for 6th and 7th grades. Alicia has 27 years of experience at Lakewood.
- **Ashley Scaffiddi** is an 8th grade ELA teacher who teaches in an ICR (In-Class Resource) setting. Ashley has 11 years of experience at Lakewood.

Quantitative Analysis of NJSLA Scores

To examine trends in Lakewood student outcomes before and after implementing CommonLit 360, we analyzed school-level scores on the NJSLA (New Jersey Student Learning Assessments) for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. School-level results on the NJSLA were retrieved from the [New Jersey Department of Education website](#).

Quantitative Analysis of CommonLit Usage and Academic Outcomes

To examine whether use of CommonLit was associated with students' academic outcomes, we analyzed students' performance on the NJSLA, their performance on the CommonLit Assessment Series, and their CommonLit 360 usage throughout the school year. This analysis sample included 706 students who took the NJSLA and used CommonLit during the first year of implementation at Lakewood Middle School. For a detailed breakdown of demographics, see Table A1 in the Appendix.

CommonLit 360 usage. CommonLit 360 usage was defined as the number of digital CommonLit 360 lessons submitted by a student as well as the number of non-digital CommonLit 360 lessons downloaded by a student’s teacher. On average, Lakewood teachers downloaded 82 CommonLit 360 lessons over the course of the school year. Lakewood students submitted an average of 32 digital CommonLit 360 lessons. Therefore, the average number of CommonLit 360 lessons submitted by students or downloaded by teachers was 114 lessons. Lakewood teachers implemented CommonLit 360 with high fidelity.

CommonLit Assessment Series. Reading growth was measured using the CommonLit Assessment Series. The CommonLit Assessment Series includes valid benchmark reading assessments that have been developed and calibrated based on over a million student responses. Scaled scores on the assessments range from 150 to 250. Students' scores on the CommonLit Assessment Series can be categorized into the following performance categories: Below/Approaching Grade Level (Not Proficient), On Grade Level (Proficient), or Above Grade Level (Proficient). To read more about how these performance categories were established, see this [support article](#).

Results

Growth on the NJSLA

We examined the trends in students’ scores on the state ELA assessment (NJSLA) during the 2021-2022 school year compared to the 2022-2023 school year. According to the NJSLA, students’ scores can be categorized into the following performance categories: Level 1 (Not Yet Meeting Expectations), Level 2 (Partially Meeting Expectations), Level 3 (Approaching Expectations), Level 4 (Meeting Expectations), and Level 5 (Exceeding Expectations).

Figure 1 presents the distribution of students’ performance categories across years. The amount of students who met or exceeded expectations was 10.5 percentage points higher in 2022-2023 than in 2021-2022. For the 2021-2022 school year, 32.5% of LMS students either met expectations (Level 4) or exceeded expectations (Level 5). After implementing CommonLit 360 as their core ELA curriculum, Lakewood Middle School saw gains in their NJSLA performance; 43.0% of LMS students either met or exceeded expectations.

Lakewood Middle School NJSLA Performance (SY 21-22 vs. SY 22-23)

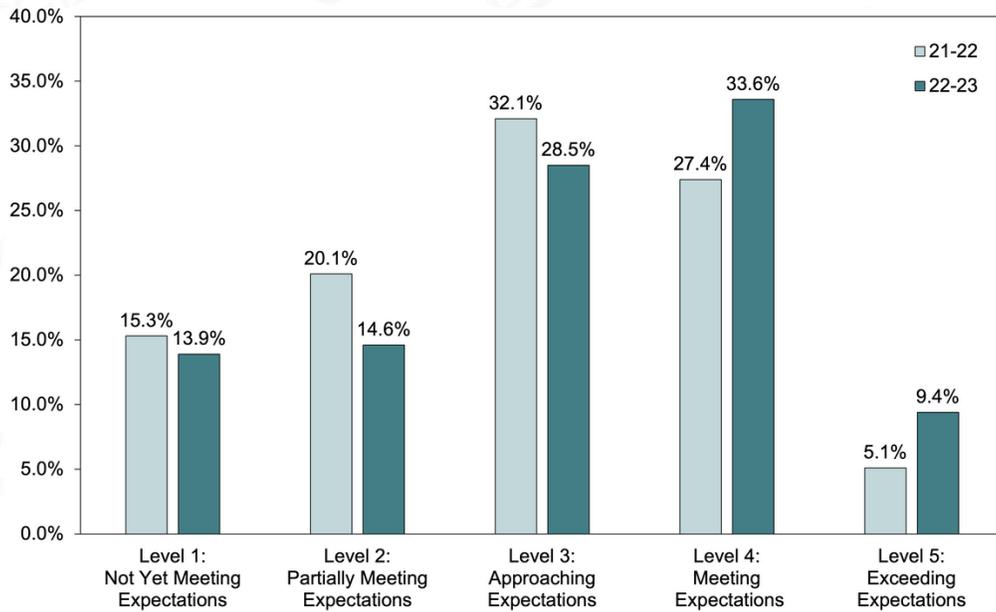


Figure 1. Lakewood Middle School students’ performance on the NJSLA in SY 21-22 compared to SY 22-23.

One alternative explanation is that the NJSLA was less difficult in 2022-2023 than in 2021-2022. To address this, we compared Lakewood’s growth on the NJSLA to state-wide growth on the NJSLA (see Figure 2). For all middle school students in New Jersey, the amount of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the NJSLA was only 2.9 percentage points higher in 2022-2023 than in 2021-2022.

State Wide NJSLA Performance (SY 21-22 vs. SY 22-23)

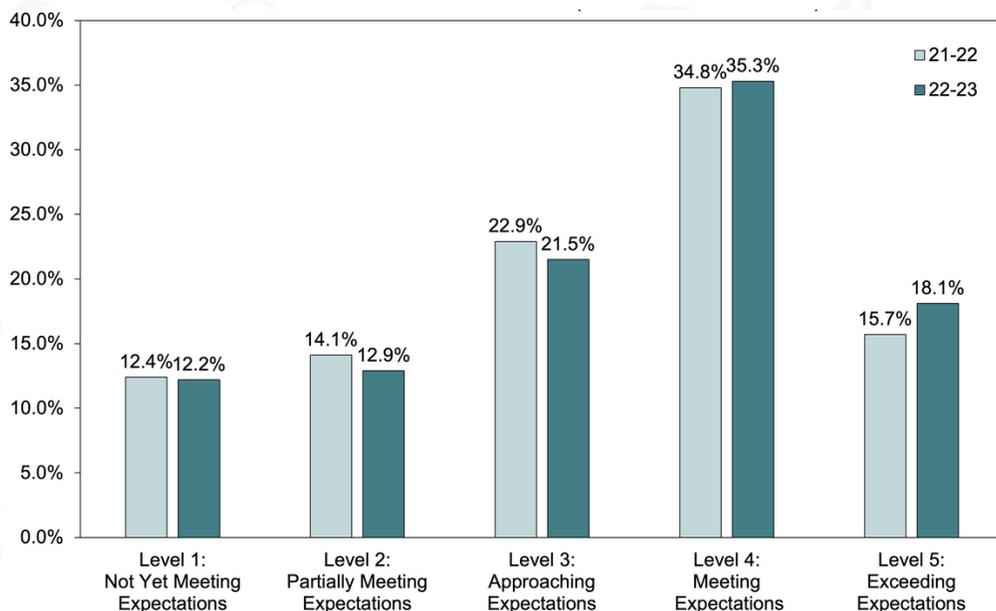


Figure 2. New Jersey middle school students’ performance on the NJSLA in SY 21-22 compared to SY 22-23.

During interviews, teachers noted the positive trends on the NJSLA and attributed the gains to CommonLit. Specifically, teachers noted that the questions asked on CommonLit were just as rigorous as, if not more than, the questions students see on the NJSLA. In contrast to other ELA programs used in the past, CommonLit served as great preparation for the NJSLA.

“We had great success with it last year. Our scores were phenomenal... A lot of our students really improved... For the most part, the questions that you guys ask are harder than the ones they see on the state test. So it gets them ready. They're like, ‘Oh, well, I know what these questions ask,’ and they're able to then apply what they've learned. So much different from the book work and [the other program] that we did before... You can't practice 3 weeks before the test, and all of a sudden, be successful. It's just not going to happen. CommonLit prepares them.”

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“The multiple choice questions on CommonLit are harder than what they see on the state test...They're not as rigorous on the state test, so I spent a lot of time breaking down the prompts so that they understand what exactly is expected of them.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

“Scores went up, and I'm hoping that's attributed to our structure with CommonLit. Even the wording of the questions is very much like the way that the state testing is. I feel like when we were using other programs, they were lower level questions. So when students would get to state testing, they'd be like, ‘I don't understand this question,’ and I'd be like, ‘I can't really help you.’ Looking at CommonLit, a lot of the questions are phrased and worded the same way it would be on state testing.”

- Ashley Scafiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

Correlations between the NJSLA and the CommonLit Assessment Series

Teachers' observations about CommonLit preparing students for the NJSLA were supported by our quantitative analysis of the correlations between the NJSLA and the CommonLit Assessment. Performance on the NJSLA can be broken down by the overall scale score, the reading scale score, and the writing scale score. The dataset we examined included all three of these scores from the NJSLA, as well as scores from the CommonLit Assessment at the beginning of the year (pretest) and end of the year (posttest). Table 1 presents the correlations between the two ELA assessments, along with their 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. Correlations between the NJSLA and the CommonLit Assessment Series (N = 706)

	CommonLit: Pretest		CommonLit: Posttest	
	Correlation	95% CI	Correlation	95% CI
NJSLA: Scale Score	.67	(.64, .71)	.57	(.51, .62)
NJSLA: Reading Scale Score	.71	(.68, .74)	.63	(.59, .68)
NJSLA: Writing Scale Score	.49	(.43, .53)	.39	(.32, .45)

The correlation between the CommonLit pretest and the NJSLA overall scale score was $r = .67$ – a moderately-strong positive correlation (note: correlations can range from -1 to +1). The correlation between the NJSLA and the CommonLit pretest was even stronger when looking at the Reading Scale Score, $r = .71$. The correlation between the NJSLA writing scale score and the CommonLit pretest was significantly positive and moderate, $r = .49$. This is unsurprising, as the CommonLit Assessment does not yet include a written response component. The correlations between the CommonLit posttest and NJSLA were significantly positive and somewhat weaker than the correlations between the CommonLit pretest and NJSLA. We speculate that this may have reflected assessment fatigue at the end of the year. Nevertheless, all correlations between the two ELA assessments were positive and statistically significant, p 's < .001.

Growth on the CommonLit Assessment Series

We also examined students' reading growth through their scores on the CommonLit Assessment. To calculate reading growth, we subtracted students' pretest from their posttest. The average reading growth was 9.67 scaled score points (see Table A2 in the Appendix for descriptive statistics of students' performance on the NJSLA and CommonLit Assessment Series). To put this reading growth into perspective, we compared students' performance categories at the beginning and end of the year. Students' scores on the CommonLit Assessment Series can be categorized into the following performance categories: Below/Approaching Grade Level (Not Proficient), On Grade Level (Proficient), or Above Grade Level (Proficient).

Figure 3 presents the distribution of students' performance categories. Out of the 706 students in the dataset, 566 (80.2%) scored Below/Approaching Grade Level (Not Proficient) on the CommonLit Assessment at the beginning of the year. By contrast, 140 Lakewood students (19.8%) scored Proficient (On Grade Level or Above Grade Level). By the end of the year, students saw major reading gains. The number of Lakewood students who scored Proficient at the end of the year was 295 students (41.8%). This represents a 111% increase in the number of students who scored Proficient at the beginning of the year (140) compared to the end of the year (295). That is, one year after using CommonLit 360, Lakewood Middle School more than doubled the number of students who scored Proficient.

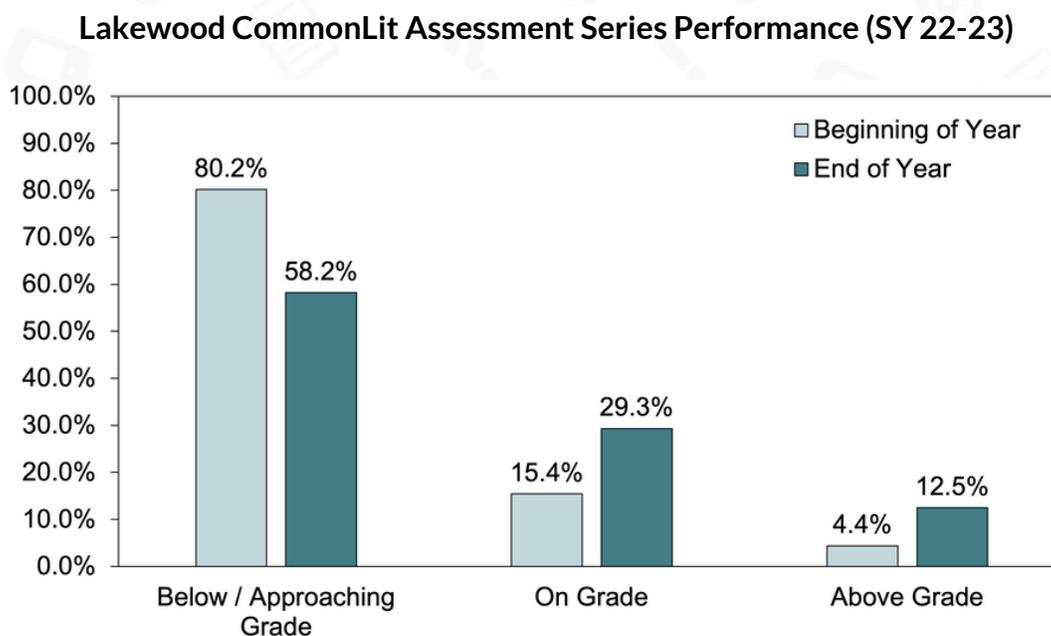


Figure 3. Lakewood Middle School students' performance on the CommonLit Assessment Series at the beginning and end of the 2022-2023 school year.

CommonLit 360 Usage and Assessment Scores

To dive deeper into Lakewood's gains, we examined the relationship between students' CommonLit 360 usage and ELA test scores. Specifically, in a series of statistical models, we examined the relationship between the number of CommonLit 360 lessons that students experienced and their performance on the NJSLA (overall, reading, and writing) and the CommonLit Assessment (posttest). This analysis controlled for several important factors that may predict end-of-year assessment performance, including students' baseline scores (using the CommonLit pretest), demographics (gender, English Language Learner status, and Special Education status), and classroom effects.

The number of CommonLit 360 lessons that students experienced significantly predicted their overall NJSLA score ($p < .001$), their NJSLA reading score ($p < .001$), their NJSLA writing score ($p = .002$), and their CommonLit posttest score ($p = .046$). In other words, the more CommonLit 360 lessons students experienced, the better they tended to perform on end-of-year ELA assessments.

In the Appendix, Tables A3-A6 include the output for each of these models, and Table A7 includes the results for a model that tested whether these findings differed by student demographic groups. The relationship between CommonLit 360 usage and NJSLA performance held for all student demographic groups.

Themes from Interviews with Lakewood Staff

To understand how Lakewood Middle School achieved these exciting gains, we interviewed Lakewood staff to learn more about how teachers were using CommonLit in their classrooms. In this section, we outline key themes from these interviews to illustrate the impact of CommonLit on students, teachers, and administrators. We also share quotes describing Lakewood's process of adopting CommonLit 360 as their core ELA curriculum.

How CommonLit Shaped Teaching Practices and the Classroom Environment

Question: *Has your classroom or practice changed in any ways since adopting CommonLit 360?*

Lakewood teachers reported that CommonLit's data dashboard shaped their instructional approach and saved them a lot of time. They shared that the data dashboard provided them with feedback about where students were struggling the most so that they could tailor the focus of their instruction. In other words, Lakewood teachers made great use of CommonLit 360's formative assessments – a student-centered teaching practice that encourages ongoing progress monitoring and tailored instruction based on assessment data (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Black & William, 1998; Chen & Bonner, 2021; Stiggins et al., 2004). Teachers at Lakewood appeared to be very data-driven and often used the instant data from CommonLit to shape their instruction.

“CommonLit was helpful when I was in the classroom... **I drove my instruction based on how they had done on that standard...** The data that you guys provide is all at your fingertips. Just to be able to pull it up and see where your kids are struggling and where they're succeeding, at your fingertips is amazing. Before, you would have to grade all these things and break it all down. Now this program does it for you. It makes our lives so much easier. We can look and say, ‘Oh, it's that standard. What aren't they getting? Is it the question? Is it the way it's worded? Is it the actual standard that they don't understand?’”

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“**At the beginning, I had that mentality of ‘I have to do it all for them for them to understand.’** It took until the second unit for me and my co-teacher to say, ‘Time out. Let's take a step back and let's look at it from their perspective.’ Students were still in this mentality of waiting for the answers from me. We took our own approach and mixed it up. For example, when we started the second unit, we saw that we were getting 15-50% on the main idea question, and I didn't understand what we're doing wrong. **I feel like it was because we were literally just standing up there, at the beginning, stuck in our own old ways** with the “I do” approach, and just waiting for the answer. By taking that step back and saying, ‘You all read it first individually, then let's go back and talk about it as a whole,’ **we definitely saw the data take a turn in the right direction.** We just gave the mid unit assessment, and everybody got 100% on that main idea question. Every single student in all 3 classes.”

- Ashley Scafiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

“When I saw where students were falling short, I took a lot of time to go back and analyze the questions if they were getting them wrong to see, maybe it was the wording of the question, or maybe it was a particular standard. **I was able to address that so quickly, instead of waiting until the weekend when I took a pile of papers home to grade.** The next day I could pull things real quick, throw it up on the board and say, ‘Let’s look at this. Why did we get this wrong? What can we do differently?’ That helped with their progression. **I was able to tackle things faster. See things that are happening or going awry, and just address it right away so that they can move forward.**”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

Teachers also noted that the structure of the curriculum provides a predictable routine for students, and they know what to expect out of each class period. Research has shown that a predictable classroom structure can have several benefits for students, including increased achievement, engagement, and self-efficacy (Jang et al., 2010; Patall et al., 2023).

“**I feel like it changed in a positive way.** There’s more of a set routine of ‘Alright, we’re coming in and we’re going to do this first read. And then from there we’re going to annotate together. From there, we’re going to discuss these side questions...’ And from there they know that they’re going to answer those multiple choice questions as their daily activity. And they know the flip is going to be some type of writing prompt. **They know what is expected of them when they come in.** Prior to that, it was like, ‘What are we doing today...? What text are we going to look at...? Where are we looking at the text...?’ They were constantly questioning what we were going to do, whereas now, with the set routine, they know. We just got done with reading A Litany for Survival. Today, they knew we were going to annotate the poem together and that they were going to do the questions. **One of the kids even raised their hand and said, ‘So tomorrow we’re going to do a constructive response, right?’ I said, ‘You got it! It’s a constructive response day.’ They know what to expect now.**”

- Ashley Scafiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

“These kids love routine in their day to day lives. And the variety is actually built into the program. I mean, the routine is the routine and we go through the program the way it's supposed to be. But there's so many different aspects to it. **They're not just sitting there and listening or reading a text. They're talking about it. They're interacting. They know they're going to write about it.** Usually by February, I can sit back more and watch them roll. They know the expectations which I think helps. And the fact that they are doing a couple of different things on a daily basis, I think that helps. **It doesn't get boring because they're always moving and grooving.”**

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

How CommonLit Made Teachers' Jobs Easier

Question: *Has CommonLit made any part of your job easier for you?*

Lakewood teachers shared that CommonLit has made several aspects of teaching easier and more efficient – from planning lessons, to using data to determine where students are struggling, to finding standards-aligned materials, to grading, etc. By providing a full year of curriculum resources and support, CommonLit 360 allows teachers to be teachers – not curriculum writers. Lakewood teachers reported that CommonLit 360 saved them time, reduced their workload, and promoted feelings of support – important factors for preventing teacher burnout (Bettini et al., 2017; Futrell, 2008; Melnick & Meister, 2008).

“Planning is so much easier, because now I'm not searching for something that matches the standard. CommonLit already aligns to the standard... By far, my lesson planning and my data collection has been so much better than it's ever been in the past.

It's because it's all right there for you. I think that's very helpful... The fact that the data is broken down into standard is... it's amazing. And now that I have administrative access, and I can see the overall data, it blows me away. It's easy to find. It's on that dashboard. You can look into any kid, you can look at it by class, you can look at it by all students. In the classroom, I was focused on standards. If students are getting hundreds on 7.1, why am I going to continuously push 7.1? I don't need to.

They got it. It's time to move on. The fact that I can search by standard in the CommonLit Library... I can put in the standard I want, and it will bring up a library of texts. I think that in itself is far beyond any program that I've seen.”

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“At the beginning of the year, I felt like there was a lot of red in the data. I said, ‘I don’t understand what I’m doing wrong.’ To be able to see the data and kind of take a step back and say, ‘Alright. Maybe if I do it this way... and let’s see what the data looks like after that.’ That helped me as a teacher. I was thinking, ‘Am I not a good teacher? Am I doing a disservice to them? Do I not know what I’m talking about?’ To be able to see it right in front of me and say, ‘Alright. This is where they struggled. Let’s circle back to this, whether it’s in the same text or a similar text.’ That has really helped... I love CommonLit. I think it has made teaching a lot easier, especially with that instant data. It’s my go-to phrase: ‘The data is data-ing.’ They’re clearly getting better.”

- Ashley Scafiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

“The platform’s easy to use. The data is a highlight for everyone. Having that data readily available has definitely helped with our professional learning communities and our team meetings. It’s an easy way to see right away what you need to reteach and different skills that you need to focus on. It’s a big plus, and teachers love that. Everything is right there, the materials are there, everything you need is there. Especially the data and the grading. It’s been so much easier. It’s more effective because it’s immediate. I’m not pulling materials from all over the place and trying to look up a gazillion things, downloading and all that nonsense. I’m very happy with the program, and I’m all about convincing others of the same, showing them how easy it can be if they let it be.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

Kevin Walters, Lakewood’s ELA supervisor for Grades 3-12, also shared that CommonLit makes administrators’ jobs easier. For example, the data dashboard was helpful for reporting. The standardized assessments met their district’s needs for implementing common assessments. Moreover, CommonLit’s pacing guides provided a good foundation for curriculum teams as they developed their school-specific pacing guide.

“The data dashboard, where we can look up all the scores and manage it that way... That was a big help... It’s been helpful to have [the dashboard]. It’s all there, by standard, by student, by teacher. The interface, the usage of it, and the way one can compare scores is great. Many times we may have to report - sometimes at the drop of a hat. CommonLit has been helpful with that, too. It’s right there. I’ve generated spreadsheets from the dashboard and am able to put that into presentations very easily, very quickly.

We've also made sure that all of our assessments are common across the district. **CommonLit has helped us, especially with the assessments, to keep the data all in one place. Our students are taking the same assessment.** We've actually supplemented the assessments with writing pieces, but that doesn't take too much time. To be able to access those texts and the corresponding 30-40 questions has been helpful.

We created our own district pacing guide, but using the CommonLit 360 pacing guide as the basis for it was helpful. CommonLit has it spelled out – this is week 1, week 2, week 3. **We were able to put the pacing guide together much more quickly than we have in the past. That was a huge help.”**

-Kevin Walters, Supervisor of ELA 3-12, Music and Fine Arts

How CommonLit Provided Structure and Variety for Students to Grow

Question: *Can you elaborate on students’ experiences with CommonLit?*

Students felt the rigor of the program and also rose to the challenge. Teachers reported that students “hated it” because it made them think. As students got more familiar with CommonLit and the routine around it, they grew to like it. As mentioned before, the structure and routine appeared to provide a predictable structure for learning new concepts (Patall et al., 2023).

“They hate it. It makes them think, and it makes them analyze. It forces them to do the things that they don't want to do. It is not easy for them. It's not something that they can just go in and get a 100. They have to actually think about it and read through the questions. It's not just, ‘1, 2, 3.’ Any middle school kid is going to hate that, but it forces them to actually think about what they're answering before they answer it... But they liked the fact that sometimes they worked with a partner, sometimes they worked by themselves, sometimes we worked in a whole group. It gave them enough movement and routine. Kids thrive on routine. I do have some kids that have said to me, ‘You know, you really pushed me.’ I can't take full credit for that, because the program itself, it's a tough program. It's very rigorous.”

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“Oh, the kids complain that it's too hard, which just means that it's working. They like the routine once they get into the routine. After the month of September, once they get into the routine of it, they stop complaining as much.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

Teachers also commented on the rigor of CommonLit 360 for students. They shared that CommonLit helped them push students to think deeper, which led students to grow in their reading and writing abilities. This type of engagement with rigorous grade-level texts helps students grow and deepen their reading comprehension skills to prepare for secondary education (ACT, 2006; Adams, 2011).

“The discussion lessons and the writing lessons have really helped the students progress as writers. Previously, they were coming in and doing constructive responses, and we were getting 1, 2, 3 sentences with no evidence. Now with some of these lessons, it's really helped expand their writing. We're going from F's and D's to high level B answers. A lot of those discussion or writing lessons – breaking down the prompt, starting with the introduction, adding context, adding reasoning – these were all strong lessons that really helped them over the last month to become stronger writers.”

- Ashley Scaffiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

“This is our second full year, and I see a huge difference. From September to June of last year. It was amazing. It had a lot to do with the rigor and not backing off and forcing them to keep pushing themselves further... the rigor of the program itself, forcing them to do more independent work, becoming more thinkers rather than listeners.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

Lakewood students also benefited from the different modalities – whole classroom, small groups, partner work, independent work – built into CommonLit 360 that help teachers scaffold new concepts and reinforce learning. Building in opportunities for discussion and collaboration promotes students’ speaking and listening skills, which are critical for their literacy development (Applebee et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2009; Nystrand, 2006). With CommonLit, students became more confident in their reading abilities, with some volunteering to read in front of the entire class. The different modalities also made their 80-minute class periods more engaging.

“At first they were very nervous to hear themselves read or nervous to look silly in front of everybody else. As time went on, they got more comfortable with it... Someone asked today if we could popcorn-read. No one has ever asked to popcorn-read. They were so excited about it. As we're progressing through the year, I think they're getting a lot more comfortable either reading with a partner or even reading out loud. I have kids who never talk who now volunteer to read all the time.”

- Ashley Scaffiddi, 8th grade ELA teacher

“I love the way it's set up. I definitely use the whole class approach. The way CommonLit is set up where there are parts that can be more independent ... Sometimes I will have to pull back to do a whole class for some of the partner work. I do try to follow that partner format as well. I hadn't been doing partner reading, so that's definitely something that I changed, and I kind of let them go a little bit more. Now with the gradual release I force myself to do that a little bit more, even with the higher level text. I pull a lot of small groups.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

“Students have definitely been more engaged in discussions. They’re much livelier. In one classroom, I observed students having a debate about a topic, and I thought, ‘Yes, this is what it should be!’ Obviously, we want our students writing – they always need to do more of that. But taking a break from it and getting their voices heard and their thoughts just out into the air before they write them down is a good strategy. **And the students are definitely more invested and interested in what they're reading. I think a huge shift has been focusing on the themes from CommonLit.** [The previous curriculum] kind of jumped around, or maybe there was a theme between a short story and an article, and then they moved on to something else. CommonLit sticks with the same theme for about a month and a half or so in each of the units. It is beneficial. **I've heard teachers and students in classrooms refer back to a short story from 3 weeks ago. It's still part of the conversation though because it's of the same theme.”**

-Kevin Walters, Supervisor of ELA 3-12, Music and Fine Arts

Lakewood’s Process of Adopting the CommonLit 360 Curriculum

Question: What was ELA instruction like at Lakewood prior to adopting CommonLit 360?

Lakewood was using a different ELA curriculum for 12 years and began to look for a new ELA curriculum when the standards in New Jersey changed and reading growth was stagnant. A team of teachers, along with the ELA supervisor, assessed whether CommonLit 360 met their needs. Lakewood adopted CommonLit 360 because of the alignment to the new standards, higher-level questions, and ready-to-teach curriculum. Notably, CommonLit 360 was seen as a culturally responsive curriculum that provided both windows into others’ worlds and mirrors reflecting students’ own experiences (Style, 1988). The impact of CommonLit 360 was seen in the gains on the NJSLA as well as teachers’ observations of students’ learning.

“A huge selling point of CommonLit was the diversity of authors and the diversity of the characters in the fiction pieces. Our students hear this from 3rd grade to 12th grade – fiction is windows and mirrors. I feel CommonLit does a really good job of showing a mirror to the students, so the students can see themselves in what they're reading. With other older textbooks, that wasn't really the case. It was all windows into other worlds which is good, too. But those textbooks were lacking the mirror. CommonLit does a good job of doing both equally. Our students read something like the Great Gatsby, and it might as well be Lord of the Rings, because our students have little understanding of that life, that atmosphere, that time period. I think it's a good thing for them to see what life is like in a different time period, but at the same time, getting to read an article about contact sports if they're a football player, or getting to read an article about adolescence, or children and parents are other good themes for them to explore. **I think it's important for them, because they're getting to come to school, and getting the mirrors and windows instead of just being told that it's a mirror.”**

-Kevin Walters, Supervisor of ELA 3-12, Music and Fine Arts

“We had been using [a different ELA curriculum] for probably for 12 years, and it served its purpose for a while, but it wasn't enough. Kids weren't moving as much as they should and so we had looked at CommonLit. We had all been using CommonLit as a supplement, going into the library and finding stories and informational text. Our ELA supervisor, Kevin Walters, talked about it with us and we looked at the 360 curriculum. We said, ‘This looks pretty good. It's aligned to the standards perfectly, and let's give it a shot and see what happens.’ It was met with – some people wanted it, some people didn't. I was always the type to say, ‘Let's go for it and see what happens. I'm going to execute it with fidelity. If it works at the end of the year we'll see it. If it doesn't work, we'll see it. The data will show.’ **My students last year grew tremendously from the year before. I wish I had the exact number, but most of my students met or exceeded expectations on the NJSLA that they take at the end of the year. I was super proud of them.”**

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“I've been on the curriculum development team for the building since I've been here. We've been through a whole lot of different programs and curriculum... **We needed to find something that was more current and up to date.** I was part of the group that rewrote the curriculum and we met over the summer to start doing it. A couple of us in the building had already started using CommonLit here and there, didn't know too much about it, but pulled it as a resource. **We started pulling all these books and things to start writing this curriculum, and we realized it was all there already in CommonLit 360.** So why reinvent the wheel? We looked at CommonLit 360 very closely and we paced it out using your pacing guide and made it fit our needs.”

- Alicia Intromasso, 7th grade ELA teacher, Special Education Coordinator

Question: *How did Lakewood roll out the adoption of CommonLit 360?*

The rollout of CommonLit 360 was, and still is, a process. There was initial pushback with teachers who were used to the previous ELA curriculum and perceived CommonLit 360 as a scripted program that limited their freedom. Several factors contributed to a smoother rollout and transition, including: paid professional development sessions before the school year, support from CommonLit staff, guidance from fellow teachers and the literacy coach, instilling autonomy in teachers, regular check-ins during professional learning communities (PLCs), and increased familiarity with CommonLit's program. As Lakewood continues to ramp up their implementation of CommonLit 360, there is a lot of potential for students and teachers to realize the benefits of the rigorous curriculum.

“They're just starting to see. They thought that CommonLit was a scripted program. I said, ‘**No, you still have to teach. They're not taking that part away from you.**’ We do have some brand new teachers, and I think they're having the same kind of struggles. I've been going in and trying to help and showing them, ‘So this is where we struggled last year. **You are the teacher. You know the students. CommonLit is just on the computer. They don't know your kids and they can't make those decisions.**’”

- Sarah Johnson, Literacy Coach for Grades 7-12

“We did 3 days of PD before school started. Kind of like a preview of the upcoming curriculum. I was able to meet with the teachers for 2 out of the 3 days for a few hours each to go over the curriculum, to look at CommonLit 360. We did a PD session with a CommonLit staff member, Veronica Diamond, and that was very helpful. We also run professional learning communities (PLC’s) every other day at the middle school, and CommonLit is what we were discussing: ‘Where are you in the curriculum? How’s it going? Did you like this text? Did the students struggle with this particular set of questions?’ Through these sessions and through these discussions, the teachers who were a little resistant to CommonLit at first are now fully on board.”

-Kevin Walters, Supervisor of ELA 3-12, Music and Fine Arts

Conclusion

Lakewood Middle School achieved notable growth in students’ reading and writing abilities after one year of implementing CommonLit 360. A year-by-year comparison of NJSLA scores showed that 43.0% of students met or exceeded expectations on the NJSLA in 22-23, compared to 32.5% in 21-22, a difference of 10.5 percentage points. Lakewood’s gains were higher than what was observed across all middle school students in New Jersey. In interviews, Lakewood teachers attributed their students’ success on the NJSLA to CommonLit.

Specifically, teachers shared that CommonLit provided them with rigorous tests to assess students’ learning over time and prepare students to demonstrate their knowledge at the end of the year. This idea was supported by two quantitative findings. First, Lakewood students demonstrated remarkable growth on the CommonLit Assessment Series. At the beginning of the year, only 19.8% of students scored proficient (on grade or above grade level) on the CommonLit Assessment. By the end of the year, Lakewood more than doubled the number of students who scored proficient on the CommonLit Assessment to 41.8% proficient. Second, a comparison of students’ scores on the NJSLA and the CommonLit Assessment Series revealed a positive relationship between the two tests. That is, students scored similarly on both tests, suggesting that the CommonLit Assessment can help them prepare for the NJSLA.

Lakewood teachers also shared that CommonLit saved them a lot of time. The ready-to-teach, standards-aligned curriculum materials made planning more efficient and they constantly used the data on the CommonLit data dashboard to track students’ progress in real time. After each

CommonLit 360 lesson, teachers looked at the data to assess their students' understanding of specific standards and, if needed, immediately adjust their instructional focus. This type of feedback loop appeared to support student gains in a meaningful way. Indeed, results consistently showed a positive relationship between the use of CommonLit 360 lessons and performance on end-of-year ELA assessments. The more CommonLit 360 lessons that students engaged in, the better they tended to perform on both the NJSLA and CommonLit Assessments.

Beyond test scores, Lakewood staff shared that CommonLit had a positive impact on students, teachers, and administrators. Teachers and administrators said that CommonLit made their jobs easier by providing ample resources for planning (e.g., pacing guides) and an instant data dashboard for tracking students' progress and reporting out on students' growth. Teachers shared that CommonLit provided structure for students in the classroom, where students showed up knowing what to expect based on what was covered the previous day. This routine was balanced with a variety of classroom modalities to facilitate students' learning in different ways and keep the class periods engaging for students. Moreover, teachers reported that students felt like the texts and themes in the curriculum served as both windows into others' perspectives and mirrors reflecting their own personal experiences. Teachers also shared that CommonLit 360 pushed their students to think more critically and helped students build confidence in their reading abilities.

In sum, findings from interviews and assessment data suggested that Lakewood experienced remarkable gains after implementing CommonLit 360. We do, however, caution against overinterpreting the quantitative findings, as they are correlational in nature and not causal. We acknowledge that there may be factors beyond CommonLit that can also contribute to students' reading growth. We also caution against overgeneralizing the qualitative findings, as the specific experiences shared by the educators we interviewed may not be shared by every educator at Lakewood Middle School. The process of adopting and internalizing a full-year ELA curriculum can take time, as observed in Lakewood's own story of how they rolled out CommonLit 360. This case study report highlighted exciting findings of the early success that Lakewood Middle School is experiencing with CommonLit 360. As Lakewood continues to implement CommonLit 360, we hope that students and teachers continue to benefit from the curriculum.

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Appendix

Table A1. Student demographics at Lakewood Middle School during the 2022-2023 school year.

	Student with NJSLA Scores	Students with NJSLA Scores and CommonLit Data
Number of students	915	706
Grade	6th: 295	6th: 235
	7th: 274	7th: 177
	8th: 346	8th: 294
Gender	47% female	48% female
	53% male	52% male
Race/Ethnicity	89% Hispanic or Latino	90% Hispanic or Latino
	6% Black or African American	6% Black or African American
	3% White	3% White
	1% Asian	1% two or more races
	1% two or more races	< 1% Asian
	< 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	< 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
English Language Learner Status	25%	23%
Economic Disadvantage Status	94%	95%
Students with Disabilities	30% IEP students	24% IEP students
	3% 504 students	3% 504 students

Table A2. Descriptive statistics for assessment scores.

Assessment	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
CommonLit assessment (beginning of year)	195.14	14.18	157-250
CommonLit assessment (end of year)	204.68	14.53	169-250
NJSLA (scaled score)	747.32	35.66	650-850
NJSLA (reading scaled score)	44.57	13.72	10-90
NJSLA (writing scaled score)	35.87	11.36	10-60

Tables A3 - A6 present results from four hierarchical linear models. These models included the same set of variables to predict the following assessment scores: NJSLA - Total Scale Score (Table A3), NJSLA - Reading Scale Score (Table A4), NJSLA - Writing Scale Score (Table A5) and CommonLit Posttest (Table A6). To control for classroom effects, teachers were modeled as a random intercept ($ICC_{\text{teacher}} = .53, .42, .50, \text{ and } .22$ for each of the models, respectively). These models account for the nested structure of the data, such that students are nested within teachers (i.e., classrooms).

In each model, the test score was regressed on the number of CommonLit 360 lessons students experienced (grand-mean centered), CommonLit baseline assessment scores (grand-mean centered), English language learner status (0 = not ELL, 1 = ELL), special education status (0 = not Special Ed, 1 = Special Ed), economic disadvantage status (0 = not economically disadvantaged, 1 = economically disadvantaged), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), grade (with 8th grade as the reference group), average number of CommonLit 360 lessons experienced (classroom-level), and average beginning-of-year scores (classroom-level). As shown in Table 2 in the main report, CommonLit 360 usage significantly predicted performance on the NJSLA and CommonLit tests, even when controlling for baseline scores, student demographics, and classroom effects.

Table A3. Hierarchical linear model predicting NJSLA Performance (Total Scale Score).

Predictor	γ	SE	df	t-value	p-value
Intercept	744.65	4.81	117.95	154.86	< .001
Total CL360 lessons experienced	0.78	0.20	682.14	3.83	< .001
CL baseline assessment score	1.10	0.07	687.62	16.05	< .001
English language learner status	-4.49	2.50	679.00	-1.79	.073
Special education status	2.89	2.43	667.99	1.19	.235
Economic disadvantage status	3.58	3.43	683.61	1.04	.297
Gender	-4.08	1.54	684.39	-2.65	.008
Grade 6	8.41	3.89	94.16	2.16	.033
Grade 7	-2.62	4.51	97.37	-0.58	.563
Classroom effect: Avg. CL360 lessons	-0.60	0.21	650.12	-2.85	.005
Classroom effect: Avg. CL baseline scores	1.18	0.30	23.91	3.94	< .001

Table A4. Hierarchical linear model predicting NJSLA Performance (Reading Scale Score).

Predictor	γ	SE	df	t-value	p-value
Intercept	200.83	2.11	161.89	95.21	< .001
Total CL360 lessons experienced	0.21	0.10	680.93	2.00	.046
CL baseline assessment score	0.66	0.04	687.90	18.66	< .001
English language learner status	-2.50	1.24	444.84	-2.02	.044
Special education status	1.38	1.20	429.10	1.16	.247
Economic disadvantage status	0.54	1.76	686.25	0.31	.759
Gender	2.15	0.79	688.48	2.73	.006
Grade 6	5.69	1.53	29.80	3.73	< .001
Grade 7	2.25	1.75	25.90	1.28	.211
Classroom effect: Avg. CL360 lessons	-0.15	0.11	694.24	-1.42	.157
Classroom effect: Avg. CL baseline scores	-0.12	0.10	26.34	-1.14	.264

Table A5. Hierarchical linear model predicting NJSLA Performance (Writing Scale Score).

Predictor	γ	SE	df	t-value	p-value
Intercept	34.12	1.96	89.59	17.43	< .001
Total CL360 lessons experienced	0.24	0.08	680.81	3.07	.002
CL baseline assessment score	0.20	0.03	686.07	7.85	< .001
English language learner status	0.85	0.95	693.05	0.90	.369
Special education status	1.53	0.92	689.50	1.67	.096
Economic disadvantage status	2.83	1.29	681.67	2.20	.028
Gender	-2.35	0.58	682.35	-4.07	< .001
Grade 6	0.23	1.58	143.81	0.15	.882
Grade 7	0.15	1.82	153.58	0.08	.936
Classroom effect: Avg. CL360 lessons	-0.17	0.08	575.86	-2.17	.030
Classroom effect: Avg. CL baseline scores	0.42	0.13	20.89	3.15	.005

Table A6. Hierarchical linear model predicting CommonLit posttest performance.

Predictor	γ	SE	df	t-value	p-value
Intercept	44.63	1.74	176.99	25.60	< .001
Total CL360 lessons experienced	0.32	0.08	683.93	3.78	< .001
CL baseline assessment score	0.52	0.03	689.29	18.45	< .001
English language learner status	-3.44	1.00	570.82	-3.45	< .001
Special education status	0.73	0.97	547.89	0.76	.447
Economic disadvantage status	-0.57	1.40	687.16	-0.41	.685
Gender	-0.08	0.63	688.43	-0.12	.904
Grade 6	3.98	1.32	48.46	3.01	.004
Grade 7	-0.90	1.53	44.73	-0.59	.558
Classroom effect: Avg. CL360 lessons	-0.26	0.09	691.76	-3.06	.002
Classroom effect: Avg. CL baseline scores	0.29	0.09	31.38	3.15	.004

Table A7 includes the results for a model that tested whether these findings differed by student demographic groups. This model included the same outcome and predictor variables as in Table A3, and also modeled the interactions between CommonLit usage and student demographic variables. The interactions between CommonLit usage and special education status, economic disadvantage status, and gender were not statistically significant. There was a significant interaction between CommonLit usage and English language learner status. Follow up analyses showed that the relationship between CommonLit usage and NJSLA performance was significant for both ELL students - $\gamma = 1.09$, $SE = 0.23$, $t(689.36) = 4.84$, $p < .001$ - and non-ELL students - $\gamma = 0.85$, $SE = 0.22$, $t(679.21) = 3.99$, $p < .001$. The significant interaction indicated that the relationship was slightly stronger among ELL students than non-ELL students. Taken together, results showed that the relationship between CommonLit 360 usage and NJSLA performance held for all student demographic groups.

Table A7. Hierarchical linear model predicting NJSLA Performance (Total Scale Score).

Predictor	γ	SE	df	t-value	p-value
Intercept	745.23	4.65	151.21	160.13	< .001
Total CL360 lessons experienced	0.85	0.21	679.21	3.99	< .001
CL baseline assessment score	-3.17	2.54	680.95	-1.25	.213
English language learner status	1.96	2.51	552.91	0.78	.434
Special education status	-4.32	1.54	687.56	-2.80	.005
Economic disadvantage status	4.60	3.67	682.23	1.26	.210
Gender	1.10	0.07	684.21	15.98	< .001
Grade 6	6.78	3.54	53.50	1.92	.061
Grade 7	-2.50	4.08	50.60	-0.61	.543
Classroom effect: Avg. CL360 lessons	-0.64	0.21	674.33	-3.08	.002
Classroom effect: Avg. CL baseline scores	1.12	0.26	26.99	4.27	< .001
CL360 lessons x ELL status	0.24	0.07	230.88	3.49	< .001
CL360 lessons x Special education status	-0.07	0.06	246.20	-1.16	.246
CL360 lessons x Ec. disadvantage status	-0.01	0.03	690.93	-0.22	.826
CL360 lessons x Gender	-0.06	0.06	680.02	-0.94	.350